

Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger

Following remarks at National Press Club, Washington, D.C.

Tuesday, May 1, 1984 - 1:30 PM

Mr. John Fogarty, President of NPC: Thank you, Secretary Weinberger. We do have a lot of questions and let's get to them.

Q: Do you believe that by staying away from talks the Soviets are attempting to diminish the reelection chances of President Reagan?

A: Well, that certainly is a possible interpretation of the frustrating problems we've had in trying to continue to pursue the arms reduction talks, either at the intermediate level or at the strategic level. We're even having trouble securing a very minor but important agreement to upgrade and improve the Hotline that hasn't really had the latest technological advances built into it for 25 or 30 years. I hope this is not why they're staying away, but it is certainly subject to that interpretation. I would much rather have the talks resume and continue without any reference to the election or the reelection campaign.

Q: What advances do you foresee in Soviet offensive strategic capabilities to counter U.S. strategic defense while the latter is being developed?

A: There have always been arguments that you shouldn't try to develop anything new or work on it because it will be provocative or that it will lead the Soviets to conclude that they must attack before you get the defense and so on. They have been working on it, as I've said for many years, since roughly 1967 and I just think that it is vital that we try to develop it.

The President has said this technology will be shared. The important thing is to bear in mind that the Soviets have made no such offer, and it would be a far more perilous world if they secured it first. But for all the other reasons I think it's vital that we pursue it because I think ultimately it is by far the best way to maintain the peace.

Q: Why are the Russians constantly sending subs into Swedish waters? Do you view this as a provocative act?

A: I don't think it can be viewed any other way. I think they do it because they regard that area as a potentially important battlefield. It's one that they are gathering intelligence about in a somewhat unconventional way, but I think it is bound to be provocative and it certainly has caused the Swedish government to take all the precautions that it can to try to prevent it and to safeguard their own defensive capabilities.

Q: This one's on the MX and generally the questioner points out that last year the MX got through the House by just nine votes. They're wondering how you plan to get it through the House this year and then they talk a little bit about the compromise from cutting the number of missiles from 40 to 30 and then they ask is that a good compromise from your viewpoint?

A: Well, it's a compromise which would delay the ultimate regaining of modernization of our nuclear strategic triad. We have, as I say, been debating the MX for something like 12 years. What we have sought, what the Scowcroft Commission recommended strongly, was the acquisition of an adequate, modernized, deterrent force. Not to be used first or anything of the kind but to make sure that the Soviets are aware of our retaliatory capability and that we would have a missile with the accuracy and the yield to destroy Soviet hardened targets. And it is important that we regain that capability.

I don't have any idea what the vote will be. I have never predicted what the Congress would do or would not do, but I know that the basic plan, the ultimate need, remains the same and if it is delayed or slowed down it will simply mean that the whole program will cost more than it would cost now, more than it has to cost and it will be delayed longer than it should be.

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don't have any need to do that and we're therefore anxious to maintain the conditions that have produced such a fine result with the volunteer system at the moment. This is not to say that there can not be and indeed should not be a continual examination of all aspects of the military budget including military retirement. I would be somewhat surprised if there was a full examination of this in the Congress this year. There have been various suggestions made and these suggestions are before the Congress, but I haven't seen any indication in the comparatively short period of time remaining in this session that there will be any consideration of these major changes this year.

Q: On Law Day, what is your opinion of the United States government's refusal to go before the World Court on the mining of the Nicaraguan harbors?

A: Well, on Law Day, is a good day to present the formal, legal arguments as to why the World Court has no jurisdiction over this matter, particularly in view of the previous non-adherence of Nicaragua, and in view of a number of other factors as to whether or not these matters are within the purview of the Court. These matters have all been set forth in formal legal briefs by the State Department and I think that the arguments that are made are justified, the position that we have taken.

Q: Do you agree with Knight Ridder's recent series of articles on the B-1 bomber that "Three U.S. Presidents and their defense policy makers have rejected manned bomber production" because manned bombers are obsolete and the B-1 was put into production by President Reagan and Congress only as sort of a pork barrel project? And related to that, did President Carter's decision to go full speed ahead with the so-called Stealth manned bomber indicate that he did indeed see a role for manned bombers in the future?

A: Well, the answer to the first question is no. I don't think it's a pork barrel and I do think there is very much a role for manned bombers. It is our hope and belief that it is essential to improve our conventional strength as well as regaining a modernized nuclear deterrent. The B-1 helps with both of those and helps very much particularly in view of the fact that the newest B-52 is 26, 27 years old now and does not have and will not have the ability to penetrate Soviet air defenses nor indeed even in view of some of the Soviet capabilities to get off its bases. So I think it is absolutely essential that we proceed with the B-1.

I think the questioner's assumptions are somewhat wrong with respect to the desires of the prior Presidents. I put the money for the B-1 into the budget in 1971, I believe it was, and I didn't encounter any opposition from the President at that time nor did I encounter any opposition from his successor. It was only in 1977 when the B-1 was supposed to have rolled off the lines that it was cancelled by President Carter. I think we need it and I also think that the advanced technology bomber is another very important aspect of our deterrent capability. Again, I think that the decision of the President on October 1, 1981, that we needed to proceed with both of these and the Scowcroft Commission's unanimous recommendation that we should indeed proceed with both, both of those decisions were correct.

Q: Would the U.S. declare areas of space American territory in order to implement the space defense system much like we have extended the territory offshore?

A: What is this?

Q: Would the U.S. declare areas of space American territory?

A: No, I don't think there would be any attempt to do that nor any need to do that. If the space defense system works, and if we can develop it as we want to, there wouldn't be any need to extend our territory offshore. We would have destroyed the Soviet missiles long before they got anywhere near our shores and we would try to develop a system that would do that but there wouldn't be any need to declare any portion of space American territory.

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But we also think it is essential to the national security that we not have to escalate any kind of a nuclear conflict and that we therefore should put and do put, as I say, around 85%, 86% of our budget into conventional capabilities. That's the proportion that we have and that's the proportion roughly that would run all through the President's five year defense program if all of the sums that he has requested or appropriated. That is roughly the division, about 14%, 13% strategic and the balance conventional.

Q: The Soviet Union has been engaged in psychic research for years. How serious is the Department of Defense and the CIA's counter commitment to investigating parapsychology in defense?

A: Well, we look at everything that we think will be useful and would help us. I wouldn't be prepared to characterize the capability of the Soviets in this area. It is certainly true they've been working on it for some time and it's important that we work on it and be aware of any late developments and be prepared to avoid anything in the nature of a breakthrough. But I don't think I would want to go any further than that, not because it's all that classified, but simply because that's roughly the level at which we work.

Q: What steps are you taking to modernize submarines that were not taken by previous Administrations in the 1970s as you've said earlier?

A: Well, what we're doing first of all is developing a submarine that will carry a missile that will have for the first time the accuracy and the yield to destroy Soviet hardened targets. This is what is essential to develop our own capability to deter attack. It is an important, critically important part of the triad. We have now with the Ohio class submarines coming on at the rate of about one a year or a little better than that and with the D-5 missile that will be available in 1989, -- we tried to get it a year earlier but we found out it would cost a billion dollars more just to get that year, and contrary to what you may have heard, I do believe in austerity so we didn't do that. But this is the principle way in which we have improved the submarine part of the triad. In order to do that we do need, as I said, the bigger submarines and naturally we try in every way we can to make them quieter and make them more effective. We also work on the submarine communication as indeed we do on the command, control, communications of all parts of the triad. But primarily it is in those ways that we are now modernizing and improving the submarine leg of the triad.

Q: I think you still have some doubters out there. In the event of a Soviet first strike would they not try to shoot down our space defense station before launching their missiles against the U.S.?

A: Well, in the event of a Soviet first strike, I don't really know what they would do. What we have to do is develop a capability that will deter them from ever making that first strike. There are any one of a number of different patterns or strategies that they may follow if they are determined to make a first strike. It seems to me the important thing is for us to acquire the capability of destroying their incoming missiles before they get into the continental air space or into the atmosphere. I think that can be done and I think it is essential that we work to do it. I don't think we can stand around wondering what the Soviets might do because if they conclude that they could make a first strike they would have a great many targets and our whole desire, our whole purpose, our whole aim, is to develop a capability that will continue to deter them in one way or another from making that strike.

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